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REVIEWS

GUSTAF FRÖDING: SELECTED POEMS. Translated from the Swedish with an introduction by Charles Wharton Stork. New York, 1916. The Macmillan Co. Pp. 168.

He that would undertake to translate Fröding merely as a literary diversion would shortly discover his misjudgment of the task. The poet's mastery of style and expression, his rhythmic fluency, his use of folklore, his idiomatic vernacular—all these and other characteristics require in the translator, as a prime requisite, more than ordinary literary capacity in his own tongue. Beyond that he must possess a thorough acquaintance with the Swedish language in a general way and more specifically with the particular linguistic field in which the poet moves. Fröding's range is from the dialect of the province of Värmland to the archaic style of the early Swedish authors in his pasticcios and imitations, from the solemnity of Scripture to the low levels of talk of the city tramp and the charcoal burner of the backwoods.

With the English scholarship and independent authorship of the present translator there is no fault to find. We are here considering him as an interpreter of literature. His introduction to the translations sounds reassuring and gives promise of a work to be performed with care, accuracy, taste, conscientiousness and literary insight, qualities which we have grown accustomed to look for in vain in much recent Swedish fiction in English dress. We quote these words from Mr. Stork's introduction: "Many Swedes have asserted that the Vermland poems never could be rendered into English, though some readers of the following attempts have been so kind as to change their previous opinion. The present translator has endeavored first to live himself into the originals, and then to reproduce them in English as if he were writing them for the first time. He has above all aimed at producing vital English poetry; along with that he has tried to be as faithful to detail as his primary purpose would allow."

We agree, indeed, that an English translation of Swedish poetry should be, in the first place, *English poetry*, in the second, a *translation*, a faithful interpretation. Stork's English verse is good,—let us examine into the degree of faithfulness that the task of producing it allowed the interpreter. An examination of a number of passages in the translation has prompted the reviewer to ask himself time and again: Is Mr. Stork writing his own poems or translating Fröding's? The translator's "faithfulness to detail" will be evidenced by the following array of inaccuracies, which too is only a partial list.

In "Matrimonial Queries" Erik is made to say to Maya: "The parish feeds me and *roots* nourish you." (*Du går på roten och jag går på stat*). The sheer nonsense of the line is apparent only to those who understand that *gå på roten* means to work out, go from place to place, and *gå på stat* means to work as a day laborer at a fixed place.

Stork's mountain trolls are said to have "fists like a great iron casting," where Fröding's have *nävar såsom jättekast*, meaning huge rocks or boulders traditionally supposed to have been thrown by giants. Equally free and inaccurate is the rendering of *Det var som ett slagsmål av vettskrämda hyttor*, . . . ("Still it looked like a fight to see chimneys a-shaking"), where the meaning is, a frantic fight among the foundries themselves.

A ludicrous error is found in the next attempt, "The Old Mountain Troll." Soliloquizing about a little girl who had been kind to him, the old troll makes the reflection, *Hon vore allt mat för måns* (What a dainty morsel she would be). *Måns*, being the common pet name for cat, strongly suggests the picture of a cat devouring a pretty bird. This the translator misses entirely. He does not even get the literal meaning of the words, but seems to go on the blind conjecture that *måns* is some form of *måne* (moon) in rendering the line, "She'd be food for a month, I swear!"

We turn to "Three Carolling Girls" and stumble on a line that fairly takes our breath away. "*Udden är så later*" *de trallade alla de tre* (The odd one is so lazy, etc.), says Fröding, i.e., they sing a snatch of a popular game, where the "odd one" (*udden, uddan*), the player without a mate, is the object of the usual taunts. Now read Mr. Stork's line, "My, but the *seashore is lonely!*"

In "Homecoming" the translator gives us a misinterpretation truly monstrous for a man who might be supposed to have mastered the fundamentals of Swedish grammar. Here is the situation. The poet visits his old home and finds its charming surroundings unchanged, but the old homestead burnt down and a charred and littered area in place of it. He sings of home and father:

Det är tomt, det är bränt, jag vill lägga mig ned
invid sjön för att höra hans tal
om det gamla, som gått, medan tiden led,
om det gamla i Alsterns dal.

Mr. Stork reads *den gamla* for *det gamla* and proceeds to translate without a suspicion that this rendering spoils three stanzas and ruins the sense of an entire section of the poem. Remember that Fröding is singing of the past, of his boyhood days in the valley of Alster, with not even the mention of an old woman, then read, if you can, without a gasp, Mr. Stork's rendering into "vital English:"

It is gone, it is burned. I will lie by the side
Of the lake here and hark to his tale
Of the *woman* who lived as the calm years glide,
The *old wife* of Alsterdale.

He sings of *her* grief in a voice as low . . .
And that is the end of *my* cradle song
Of the *old wife* of Alsterdale.

Omitting comment on such trifling errors as "line" for *lin* (flax), "titled aunts" for *flicknoblessen* (girlish nobility, young ladies of family), "Look, you cat" for *fy för katten* (for shame!), we turn to "A Poor Monk of Skara" as probably furnishing the best illustrations of liberties never to be taken by a translator. The lines

. . för dråp och trilska och kätteri
och av kungen förklarad för fågelfri

are not translated, but simply corrupted thus:

"For manslaughter and for heresy
The king has *pardoned and set me free.*"

Fågelfri means outlawed, proscribed, game for any man's gun, like the birds; i.e., the very opposite of "pardoned and set free." The word might have been found in any dictionary. The next stanza:

*Allt sedan Lars Kanik jag slog,
de hava mig jagat som ulven i skog.
Det enda de funno tillrätta,
det var min munkehätta.*

(Because Lars Kanik I smote in wrath,
The brethren hastened to dog my path.
They hunted me like a wolf in the wood;
That I was a monk, that alone was good.)

This is wide of the mark. *Finna tillrätta* means simply to find, to pick up, and the obvious sense is, that in his flight from his pursuers the outlawed monk lost his cowl, and that was all they got for their trouble. Why *Kanik* (Canon) is left here and given the force of a proper noun when the subsequent *Lars Canonicus* gives the key to its meaning, is not clear.

But witness the translator's renderings in the next stanza: Evidently failing to find the word *kona* (public woman, jade, strumpet) he makes a rough guess that it has some relation to *ko* (cow). Ignoring the feminine ending *-or*, which might have served as a guide, he proceeds to interpret in his own hit or miss fashion

*. . . med konor och gigare drog jag,
och Lasse Canonicus slog jag
(I joined with a cowboy and fiddler crew,
And Lars Canonicus I slew).*

The translator, who is the author of "Sea and Bay" and "The Queen of Orplede," etc., tells us in a prefatory note that the translations in this volume have been "favorably passed upon by the Publication Committee of the American-Scandinavian Foundation." The reviewer refuses to believe that the committee could have given anything like thorough consideration to Mr. Stork's attempts and failed to discover the literary atrocities we have pointed out. The Foundation encourages the activity of recent years in the field of translation from the Scandinavian literatures, and desires to do everything in its power to promote the work. But are we to accept, blindfolded, anything that may be offered? Are high-class publishers willing to stand sponsors to any literary foundling that may be picked up and presented at the baptismal font of printer's ink? In his examination of several translations from the Swedish the reviewer has found some glaring incongruities which might have been obviated by a very slight revision. Picking up Mr. Stork's volume, I fell to reading it with high hopes. But, it must be added, these hopes were soon dispelled. To have one's sense of the ridiculous excited where an aesthetic appeal is looked for is meager compensation indeed.

If Gustaf Fröding is "the most striking and probably the greatest figure" in the "long array of distinguished Swedish poets," as his interpreter, with a shade of journalistic exaggeration, assures us, the greater is the pity he did not fall into better hands.

ERNST W. OLSON.